

Rattling the Red Man's Skeleton

Archaeologist Digs Into the Mounds of Prehistoric Americans and Learns About Their Habits of Living —Explodes Old Fallacies.

Making the old Missourians turn over in their graves is what Gerard Fowke, archeological expert of the Missouri Historical Society, is doing.

Not only is he making them turn over, but he is digging them up, hide, bones and all, and placing them on exhibition. And incidentally while doing this he is exploding theories which have been pet fancies for years. However, Fowke doesn't care. Archeology is his hobby, and digging up graves is a specialty with him.

These graves, however, are not those of our own ancestors, made sacred by the funeral rites and headstones and all the pomp and ceremony of an honest-to-goodness cemetery. Nobody knows who's buried in them, as there are no parish records. They are not set aside as places to be passed with a light tread, but they form part and parcel of the farm lands of Missouri.

In short, they are the graves of the Indian tribes that once inhabited the State.

And the pet theories that Fowke exploded are that an ancient race dubbed "Mound Builders" erected them; and also that once on a time they were used as underground houses by the Indians. Both of these stories have been told until they are implicitly believed by thousands of people.

Fowke's explorations, however, which covered a period of two years, during which he fully explored more than 200 mounds, have proven that they are nothing more nor less than primitive burying places, large and small, according to the number of bodies the Indians had saved up for their interment festival.

That isn't a joke. They really did it. They would lay away body after body until they had a good sized collection, and then with the tom-toms beating and the medicine men howling and the squaws weeping they either incinerated the bodies and dumped the ashes into the open graves; or burned them in the vaults; buried the unburned bodies without a coffin.

But to begin at the beginning. These graves, as Fowke discovered, had their origin in Missouri, and are a distinct departure from the former habits of the Indians when they did not live west of the Mississippi.

Originally the Missouri Indians, the great Siouxan family, lived in the East, and for some reason or other migrated westward. In the heavy Eastern forests they laid their dead on the ground, or in shallow graves, and covered them with earth or stone so the beasts could not reach them.

Came the migration. The Siouxans poured slowly from the Atlantic Coast through the Ohio and Kanawha valleys, and reached the mouth of the Ohio River. There they divided, some going up the Mississippi and others down.

The tribe going northward, the Omaha or "Upstreamers," lived for several generations on and near the site of St. Louis. The combination of fertile land, numerous streams and broken country made the location ideal, from an Indian point of view, but the roving spirit finally prevailed, and they broke away again, following the divergent streams along their courses, and finally reached the regions where they were found by the whites.

Among the tribes to journey from Missouri were the Sioux, the Missourians, the Osages, the Kaws (Kanas), Iowas, Ojibwas and various others, including the one which retained the name "Omaha."

In Missouri and westward they evolved the idea of the burial vault, an elaboration of the simple stone vault. The course of the tribes may be followed along the Missouri River from the mouth of the Guefondo to the north and west by the location of these graves. Some have been found in Kansas, some in northeastern Missouri. The farther west the better their architecture, showing how the aborigines improved with practice.

The few large mounds in the vicinity of St. Louis were erected by the Mound Builders, probably off shoots from tribes along the

lower Mississippi. The burial mounds are much smaller, but far more numerous. As yet every object obtained from them is of Indian manufacture, showing that they were built before either the French or the Spaniards made their explorations; otherwise they would have yielded articles procured from these people.

The construction of these graves is peculiar in itself. The Indians collected all the flat stones they could find within a convenient distance, and put them together in a four-sided enclosure. They left a passageway for entrance and then bore in the bodies. When the burial rites were concluded they filled the passage with earth and stones, and then heaped earth over all.

On two occasions Fowke discovered double-decker mounds; one grave on top of another, but there are only these two cases on record, one in Missouri and one in Ohio, where the original mound was used a second time. Many of the skeletons found were those of children, showing that comparatively few of the Indians reached maturity. Seldom, however, were there any traces of the tribesmen having been slain in battle.

Deducing facts from the skeletons, however, is one of the most difficult things to do, as the damp soil has crumbled away even the bones and teeth of the bodies, and of those that are left in many cases the slightest touch will crumble them to fragments. In connection with the bones there is another interesting fact: that Fowke has exploded.

It has long been the custom to tell gruesome tales of how the Indians practiced cannibalism, eating their war prisoners and occasionally their fellow tribesmen. To prove these stories men pointed to the tooth marks on the bones, which, as a fact, had been gnawed. But Fowke discovered, running from the graves, the tunnels of field mice, which had used the bones for whetstones for their teeth, after the custom of all rodents. The scratches left by their sharp incisors have been pointed to as the marks of flint knives.

The articles found in the graves, buried after the custom of the Indians, show the life of the particular locality. Clay vessels and permanent digging tools denote a permanent village; tomahawks, spearheads denote a hunting encampment, and knives, pipes and articles for display and personal adornment denote either.

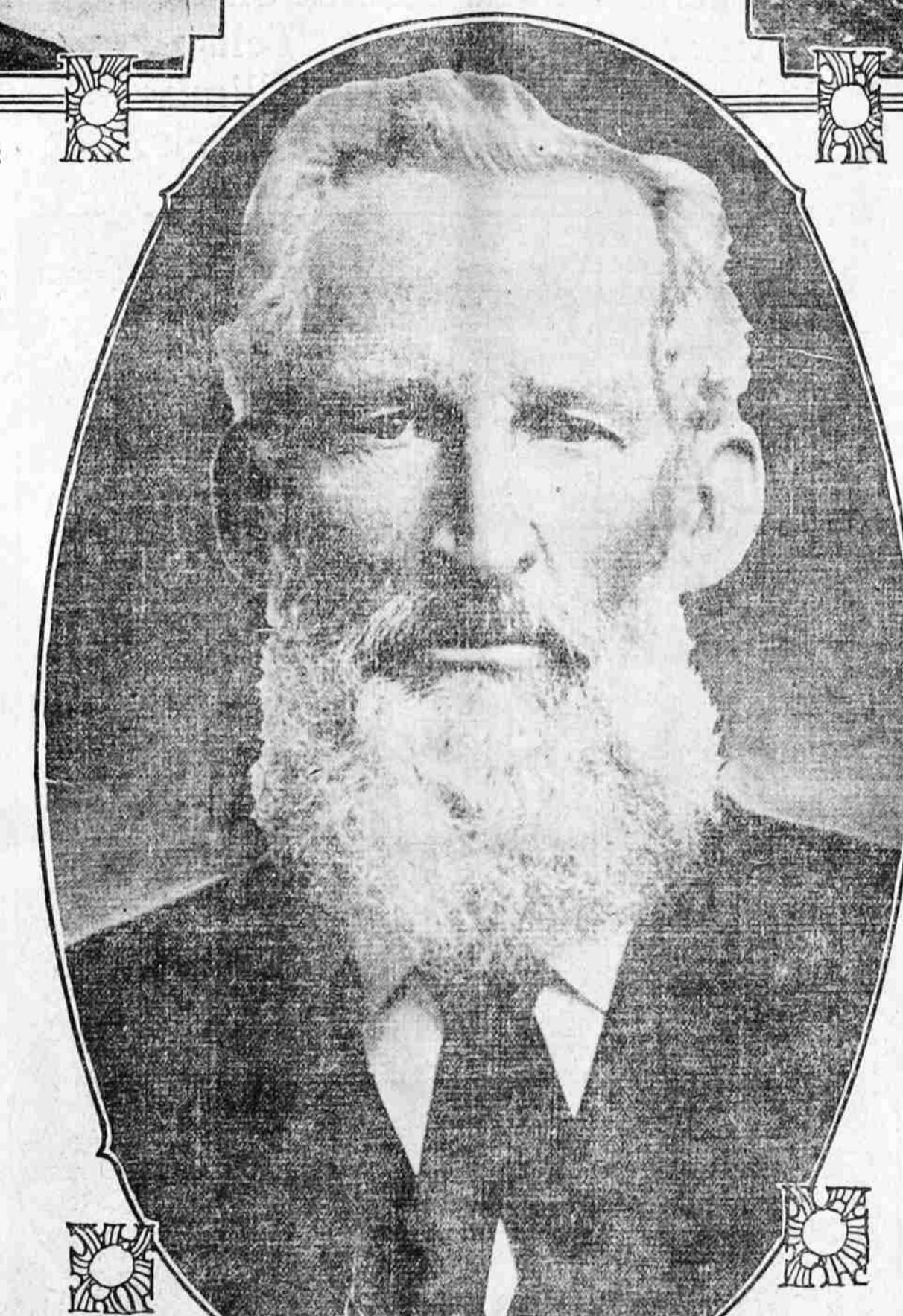
In building the vaults the Indians in nearly every case gave the interior faces an outward slope, making the graves larger at the top than at bottom. This, probably was done intentionally, to prevent the wall from falling inward, a strong backing of earth holding it up on the exterior. In some of the mounds examined, however, it was found that the builders could lay the stones vertically if they so desired.

PECULIAR METHODS TO STRENGTHEN GRAVES.

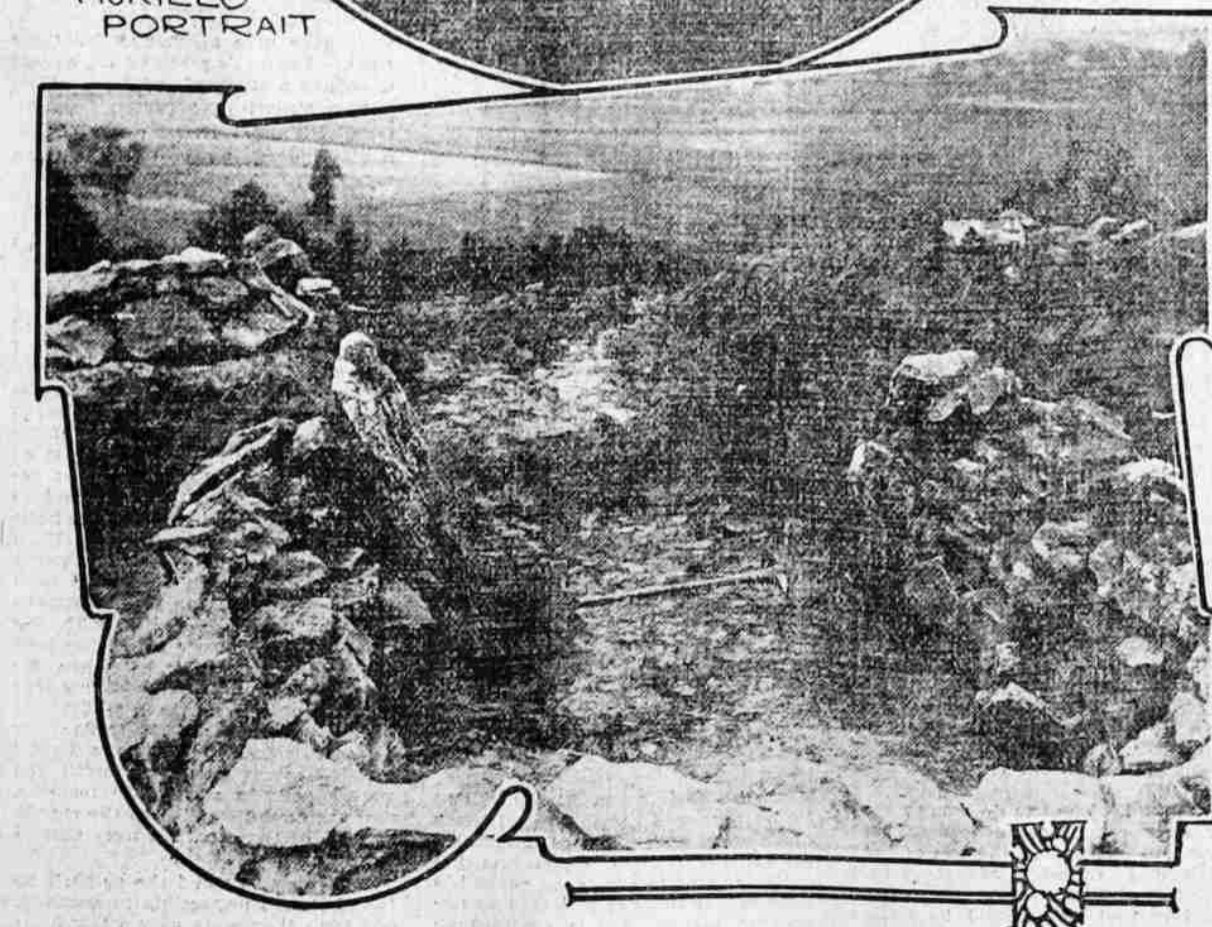
Never was there any effort made to break joints, or to interlock at corners; when a stone was ready it was placed where needed, regardless of the position of the others. With all their experience the builders apparently never learned how to strengthen the structure by arranging the courses differently.

The pottery saved by Fowke from the mounds is limited in quantity, due to the corroding influence of the wet soil, rude in finish, and, as a rule, in fragments. All the vessels are wide-mouthed pots of medium or small size; nearly all show traces of use over fire. With the exception of two specimens the clay is tempered with coarse shells, and the walls are moderately thick. The rims of most of them are narrow, upright or slightly recurved, and some are crimped on the margin, presumably with the finger nail.

Rudely modeled loop handles connect the rims with the bodies of the vessels, and in a few specimens a slight projection takes the place of the handle. The somewhat globular bodies are occasionally decorated in a rude fashion, with patterns consisting of incised lines and indentations, and many of them show impressions of cloth, pressed down on



MURILLO
PORTRAIT



GERARD FOWKE and scenes of his investigations.

boundaries and periods of time. The report of the examination of three mounds, found on a farm, will give an idea of the contents of the structures.

One of them measured thirty-seven feet in diameter and three feet in height. On the bottom, near the center, lay a number of bones, of which only four could be identified. The

only implement found in this mound was a rough flint knife, lying loose in the earth. The second mound was forty-three feet in diameter and five feet high. One skull was found, with several other bones impossible of identification. In the center, occupying a space of one by three feet, were the charred bones, in very small fragments, of three persons.

Among these remains were a bone and claw of a panther. All were covered with much burned earth, mingled with charcoal and soil, as if the debris of the funeral pyre had been thrown in on them.

The third mound was much larger than the others. Seven feet from the center and a foot above the bottom, was found a confused mass of skulls and bones of the hips, arms and legs from half a dozen bodies. Other skulls were found scattered through the mound. There were no small bones, however, and the long bones were crumbling. But little pottery was found here.

Not far from these three mounds a lodge site, or permanent camp of the Indians, was examined. Here fragments of pottery and flint chips were unearthed in large quantities, but at no point were they buried deeply.

SPACE INSIDE IS RECTANGULAR IN FORM.

One of six mounds examined, a little further to the west, yielded many interesting relics and facts. This mound was 6 feet high and was 45 to 50 feet wide. When digging stones were soon encountered, extending from the bottom to within a foot of the top. At first view these appeared to be piled at random, as part of the mound, but when all the earth had been removed they were found to cover approximately a rectangular space.

On the center, and toward the south margin, were areas free from stones. Upon examination there disclosed the interior of a vault, or chamber, made of slabs roughly laid up, as in a foundation or cellar wall, the bottom layer resting on the natural surface. The interior of this vault measures 7½ by 4½ feet.

At the middle of the vault was a single row of stones extending three feet. All of these were resting on a mass of burned earth a foot thick which extended to the west end of the vault; the condition of the deposit was not due to a fire having been made there, the earth having been brought in from the outside.

Beneath this burned layer were remains of a closely folded skeleton. Beyond the limits of the burned earth a body, or skeleton, probably that of a child, but evidently that of a young person, had been placed. East of these were found other bones.

On the original surface three more bodies, extended, had been placed, covered with a foot of earth, upon which, in turn, at least two others had been in turn placed and covered. One skeleton of each burial lay so close to the wall of the vault that fragments of bone were forced into the crevices. The only evidences of these burials were a number of fragments of long bones.

All through the mound other bones were discovered, without anything by which to trace them. Another mound yielded up many skeletons interesting from the point of view of the archeologist. A central enclosure six by nine feet proved to be the vault, and in it, a foot below the top of the mound, was found a skull. A foot lower came two skeletons, extended, with their heads toward the east, while at various points, nine or ten inches under each, were found the remains of nine more skeletons. It was estimated, though each pile of bones may have contained the remains of more than one person.

In five different places were small fragments of partially cremated human bones, including all parts of the frame. The remains of one infant had been cremated; the residue having been laid together in a little pile about the color of wood ashes. Most of the remains, however, resembled charcoal.

One of these deposits was of special interest because of an attempt to place the partially incinerated fragments in their proper relative positions on and in contact with another body or perhaps a skeleton in which the cartilages still held the frame firmly together at the time of interment. The skeleton lay at full length, on the natural surface, with the head toward the east. The bones of one foot, except the toes, and a portion of the lower leg of the partially cremated skeleton, though burned black entirely through, were found in nearly their natural order, as if the flesh had baked or hardened in the fire sufficiently to hold them together until they were laid on the corpse or skeleton previously placed on the ground.

In the south wall of this vault was a doorway thirty-one inches wide at the top and fifteen at the bottom, these dimensions affording evidence that the vault had been carried in, rather than the vault having been built up around the bodies. Further proof of this is af-

forded by the frequent discovery of fragments of bones crowded into the crevices by the settling of earth which lay around and over them.

Upon the banks of the Missouri River was discovered an old fort, used as a residence and for purposes of defense by the Indians. It is high on the bluffs above the river, a commanding situation, which made it almost impregnable to the methods of attack known in that day.

DESCENDS FROM OLD FAMILY FROM ENGLAND.

The wall is protected on the exterior by a complicated arrangement of minor embankments and trenches, but the sides of these could not be made so steep, nor of sufficient height nor depth with the amount of earth available as to balk a determined enemy.

Residents in the vicinity who were familiar with the work before it was disturbed state that originally there existed an interior ditch all around except at the entrances. All around the fort are mounds, filled with rich deposits of relics, which probably were constructed by the occupants of the village.

The timber and brush on the hill-sides of the fort were cleared away, and the ground put under cultivation. As a result the ditch was filled in for its entire length, and wholly obliterated in some sections.

When Fowke examined the work it was necessary to clear away every foot of the place with ax, scythe and knife, owing to the rank growth of the vegetation. Not the slightest evidence of palisades was found, though special search was made for it.

Fowke now is in charge of the archaeological exhibit of the Missouri Historical Society in St. Louis, and is sent out frequently by the members of the society to look into archaeological finds throughout the State.

He has given his life to the work, breaking into it when a boy in Kentucky. Near his home there were the famous Indian burying grounds on the Ohio River and he early was seized with the relic craze.

While he was teaching school his fame reached the Smithsonian Institution and he was commissioned to examine finds all over the United States. Another society then sent him to Siberia to search for traces connecting the Siberian natives with the American Indians. On this trip he traveled 700 miles in an open boat, being swamped several times and ruining all his photographs. He was compelled to even sleep in the boat for fear of the convicts on the banks of the river.

Fowke is a bachelor and is 55 years old. He is in the seventh generation of lineal descendants of Col. Gerard Fowke, a Virginian settler near Norfolk and the builder of Gunston Hall near that city. Col. Fowke fought with Charles I at Worcester and on the defeat and proscription of that monarch fled to the colonies. After the restoration he was rewarded with large grants of land by Charles II.

An old cavalry horse was in the shafts, and the officer was in a hurry. Taking the reins from the driver, he shouted "Charge!" and away the animal galloped, stopping dead when he reached the barracks at the word "Halt!"

The next morning an Englishman wanted to catch the boat from the quay, and the driver said, "Shure, your honor, there ain't a horse in old Ireland who can go so fast."

He cracked his whip and shouted "Charge!" and away the horse went.

Nearing the quay, Pat yelled: "Jump, for heaven's sake, I've forgotten the password!"

A little girl who had a live bantam presented to her was disappointed at the smallness of the first egg laid by the bird. Her ideal egg was that of the ostrich, a specimen of which was on a table in the drawing room. One day the ostrich egg was missing from its accustomed place. It was subsequently found near the spot where the bantam nested, and on it was stuck a piece of paper with the words: "Something like this please. Keep on trying."

Muriatic acid will remove oil stains from cement floors when repairs are to be made.

The Government of Paraguay has contracted for the erection of ten wireless stations.

One of the new electric heating pads is designed to be fastened under the carpet in a room.

That excessive talking is a dangerous disease is a theory advanced by a Russian scientist.